United Nations A/61/PV.1

General Assembly

Sixty-first session

Official Records

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 12 September 2006, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the President of the General Assembly

The President: I declare open the sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President: In accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Tribute to the memory of His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, late head of State of the Kingdom of Tonga

The President: Before proceeding to the items on our agenda, I have the sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the late head of State of the Kingdom of Tonga, His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, who passed away on Sunday, 10 September 2006. On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Tonga to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Tonga and to the bereaved family of His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV.

May I now invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Elbakly (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like first, on behalf of the Group of African States, to convey our heartfelt condolences on the passing of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV of Tonga on 10 September.

Also on behalf of the African Group, I express our sincere condolences to the people and Government of Tonga on the great loss of a leader who was loyal to his country and people and whose efforts in the promotion of peace and stability throughout the world were noteworthy.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to pay tribute, on behalf of the Group of Asian States, to His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, the late King of the Kingdom of Tonga, who sadly passed away last Sunday in a hospital in New Zealand.

His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV was widely known as a man of vision who devoted his entire life to the cause of the development of his country. His 41 years of tireless service and wise leadership contributed greatly to the prosperity of his

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country. He was rightly known as the cultural father of the nation and will indeed be remembered, in particular, as a great man who was able to translate many of his dreams into reality for the benefit of his people.

The late King cared for his people, did much to modernize his country, and contributed immensely to the welfare and development of the Kingdom. Asia, together with the Tongan people, will also remember him for the role he played in improving education, health care and infrastructure in the country.

The Tongan people have lost a great leader and able statesman. I wish to convey the most sincere condolences of the members of the Asian Group to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Tonga and to the bereaved family and friends of His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. May Allah grant the late King eternal peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus.

Mr. Rachkov (Belarus): On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, I would like to express our most sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Tonga on the passing of His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. We extend our deepest sympathy to the family and pay tribute to His Majesty for his extensive work in more than 60 years of State service for the benefit of the people of his country.

The late King of Tonga was known for his far-sighted leadership, with a strong belief in education, and enthusiasm and support for the modernization and larger economic growth of his country. A distinguished leader of strong dedication, His Majesty made an indispensable contribution to promoting the development of the Kingdom of Tonga and the well-being of its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Lara-Peña (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, as Chairman of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States for the month of September, I should like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this tribute in memory of His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou of the Kingdom of Tonga.

Under his reign, Tonga became a Member of the United Nations in 1999. There is no doubt that this was one step in the late King's modernizing vision for his country. On behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, I convey the heartfelt condolences of the community of peoples of our region to the people of the Kingdom of Tonga. We offer our solidarity in these sad times.

I also take this opportunity to express our sympathies to Crown Prince Tupouto'a and wish him the very best as he assumes the leadership of the Kingdom of Tonga.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): On behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States, I would like to express our deepest condolences to the people and Government of the Kingdom of Tonga on the passing of their Head of State, His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou.

The late King Taufa'ahau Tupou was the ruler of Tonga for more than 40 years. During his extraordinarily long reign, Tonga emerged as a sovereign State and as a valued Member of the United Nations, promoting peace and stability for his country. He was a respected and enlightened leader.

On this sad occasion, our thoughts and prayers are with the royal family, the Government and the people of Tonga. We share their grief and express our most sincere wishes for stability and prosperity in the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): The United States, as host country, wishes to express its deepest regrets at the passing of Tongan King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. The United States conveys its condolences to King George Tupou V, who has succeeded his father, and to Queen Halaevalu Mata'aho, other members of the royal family, and the people of Tonga.

King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV was a good friend of the United States, ensuring that Tonga stood shoulder to shoulder with us and others in promoting peace and stability in the Pacific region and the world, including, most recently, in Iraq.

In the latter years of the reign of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, Tonga took initial steps towards democracy and greater representation in Government. We wish the very best for King George Tupou V and the people of Tonga in advancing that important goal.

As we extend our deepest sympathy to the people of Tonga on the passing of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, the United States remains committed to continuing our strong ties with Tonga.

The President: I call on the representative of Tonga.

Mrs. 'Utoikamanu (Tonga): I wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of His Majesty King George Tupou V, the royal household, the Government and the people of Tonga, to convey our deep appreciation for the kind messages of condolence and sympathy on the passing of our beloved King, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. His late Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV was a God-fearing man, which enabled him to be a man of great vision. He had a long-term vision for Tonga and was the founder of modern Tonga.

During his 41-year reign, his first and foremost concern was to see the advancement of the lives of his people in spirit, mind and body. He was a true pioneer and was not afraid to consider new ideas that might improve the quality of life of his people. He was the first Tongan subject to obtain a university degree; he earned a BA and LLB from the University of Sydney. Upon his return to Tonga, he served as Minister of Education in 1943 and Minister of Health in 1944, and he was Premier from 1949 until he became King in 1965.

He was the main instigator and catalyst for the development and monetization of the Tongan economy, which saw the graduation of Tonga to developing-country status in the mid-1980s. When he was Minister of Education, he had a vision that, in view of Tonga's limited resource base, that the wealth of Tonga was in its people, and he established local schools that allowed for the training of the finest of young Tongan minds, later providing the first national scholarships for their overseas training. Tonga currently has a literacy rate of 99 per cent and has the highest per capita level of Ph.D. graduates.

With the equivalent of more than 140 per cent of its national population overseas, Tonga has been able to export some of its finest academic, technical, sports and cultural talent. In terms of foreign policy, he enabled Tonga to progress from inward-looking policies to joining regional and international agencies as well as establishing diplomatic ties with many friendly countries. This has provided further support for Tonga's economic, social, cultural and political development.

His late Majesty served his country all his life as a citizen, a civil servant, a loving father, a lay preacher and a monarch. He has finished the race. He has kept the faith.

The President *(spoke in Arabic)*: I should like first of all to refer to yesterday's commemoration of the 11 September terrorist attacks, which took place five years ago, in 2001. We share the grief of the American people and of the families of the victims.

It is an honour and pleasure for me to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the support and confidence you have placed in me.

I would like to begin by welcoming the Republic of Montenegro, the newest member of the United Nations family. I believe that it will play a valuable role in furthering the work and ideals of the Organization.

Today, the United Nations faces many challenges at all levels and therefore needs the support of the people of the world, just as the people of the world need this Organization, for this is an Organization of hope that is based on commitment, consensus and coexistence. The numerous meetings, discussions and conferences that bring together people from all over the world provide a real platform to exchange experiences and perspectives. This enables us to understand each other better, in order to achieve a global consensus on political, security, economic, environmental and social issues. Only by working together can we translate our commitments into effective actions.

The 2005 world summit was a prime example of this vision. It provided the General Assembly with a clear and wide-ranging reform agenda in the fields of development, international peace and security, human rights and management reforms. Its outcome was indeed a pillar of hope. It confirmed once again the strong and renewed commitment of the world's leaders to the values and principles of the Charter of the

United Nations, demonstrating, by their commitment, a solid resolve to implement the Millennium Development Goals.

World leaders' collective vision of a more responsive multilateral approach to the many challenges facing the world will continue to guide our common efforts to build a safer, freer and more prosperous world for all human beings.

The General Assembly at its sixtieth session, under the leadership of President Eliasson, implemented many of the recommendations adopted at the summit, such as the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund and the adoption of resolutions on development, management reform and a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Here, I should like to congratulate President Eliasson for his tireless efforts to move the reform agenda forward. I commend all Member States for their cooperation and for the spirit of compromise shown throughout the sixtieth session. They worked under intense pressure, and I trust that we can continue to move ahead with the same momentum during this session.

I should also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts in the service of the mission and the ideals of the United Nations during his tenure. He has played a pivotal role in enhancing and strengthening the Organization to meet global challenges and the emerging needs of the world.

It is important that we build upon, broaden and deepen the progress achieved thus far. Our achievements demonstrate the ability of the General Assembly to produce concrete results on important matters that concern the international community. They also demonstrate and confirm the continued importance of the Assembly as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations.

In order to continue playing that role, the General Assembly must continue to evolve and to strive to deliver sustainable solutions to the major challenges of our time. That can take place only within the framework of multilateralism. A well-functioning and proactive multilateral system is in the interest of all nations, particularly at a time when our growing interdependence is the basis for our peaceful coexistence. Multilateralism is the most effective way to ensure our collective peace and security, protect human rights and uphold the rule of law.

I believe that it is the common responsibility of Member States to make the General Assembly and the United Nations as a whole even more effective. As efforts to revitalize the General Assembly are under way, we must not lose sight of the main purpose of those actions: to meet the rising expectations of hundreds of millions of people around the world. We have the challenging task of meeting the expectations of those who are poor, malnourished or illiterate or the victims of disease. We have the challenging task of ensuring their economic and social security, which is just as important as their political and military security. We have the challenging task of liberating them from want while seeking to liberate them from fear.

I should also like to stress that more than half of the world's population — namely, women — typically have less access to health care, employment, decision-making and property ownership. That disparity must be addressed so that both women and men can enjoy the same opportunities, the same rights and the same responsibilities in all aspects of life. To promote gender equality, we need to empower women so that they have more autonomy to lead their lives. To achieve those goals, it is essential that we work closely together so that, together, we can promote human rights and achieve sustainable development.

We cannot confront all these challenges effectively if we do not have peace and security. The United Nations plays a crucial role in responding to the aftermath of natural disasters and maintaining peace and security in areas affected by violent conflict. Regrettably, the recent violence in the Middle East caused heavy casualties on both sides and extensively damaged the Lebanese infrastructure. Today, man-made conflicts are destroying lives and displacing people on a scale sometimes exceeding that of the destructive effects of nature, including floods and hurricanes.

The people of the world have placed an enormous responsibility on our shoulders, as Member States, to identify and address the causes of human conflicts. Only by working together will we be able to defeat the injustices that are at the root of conflicts.

International terrorism is another equally pressing and closely related issue. We must develop and adopt both preventive and defensive measures to combat terrorism. Within that context, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of high-quality education and conscientious media as positive vehicles for nurturing tolerance, compassion and critical thinking.

Now that the Assembly has adopted a resolution on a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288), I hope that during this session we can continue our efforts to successfully reach agreement on a comprehensive convention on terrorism.

As we prepare ourselves to complete the tasks remaining from the previous session, we shall not overlook those recommendations of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1) that have yet to be fully implemented, such as disarmament and non-proliferation, Security Council reform, mandate review and system-wide coherence. All of these are crucially important agendas. Working together in the spirit of multilateralism to achieve these goals, we can deliver a programme of work to renew, strengthen and update the United Nations.

Reform is a process rather than an event, and we will need to actively pursue work on a variety of pending issues. I trust that Member States will work together to address every issue on its own merits so that progress can be achieved at a steady pace on all the various aspects of the reform agenda.

We, the Member States, must identify our priorities. I will be more than happy to listen to members' views during the general debate and in the months ahead so that, together, we can design an action-oriented and practical workplan.

Before that, we will hold the first ever High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. I anticipate that the discussions will underscore the challenges of migration and development and the need for a collective initiative.

The following week, we will hold a High-level Meeting on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. It will outline the successes achieved and the obstacles faced by the least developed countries and lay down guidelines for the way forward — actions that need to be taken by the least developed countries, their development partners and the international community as a whole to successfully implement the Programme of Action.

Here, I should like to commend the important role that non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector play in the work of the General Assembly. It is my intention to continue to encourage and value their contributions in addressing the many challenges confronting the international community.

Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations has been a global beacon of hope and a global humanitarian necessity. Indeed, world leaders and thinkers had many years before expressed the need for a truly global forum based on high ideals. At the Paris Conference in January 1919, the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, called for the creation of an organization that would be the eye of the nations, to keep watch and act on their common interests — an eye that does not slumber, but is everywhere attentive.

Today, should that eye become weary, it is up to us, the Member States, to revitalize and reinforce its role so that our Organization remains the beacon of hope for the peace, prosperity and order of all nations.

(*spoke in English*)

I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to congratulate you, Madam, on behalf of the Asian Group, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session and to wish you every success as you carry out the important tasks entrusted to you. Given your valuable experience and sincere dedication, we are sure that our Organization, including the Assembly, will benefit from your able stewardship at this very important juncture in the history of the United Nations.

We in the Asian Group will, indeed, spare no effort to extend our constructive cooperation to you throughout your tenure as President of the Assembly. You can count on all of us in the Asian Group. We assure you that we will do our utmost to work with you to make your presidency a success.

We should also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, who so efficiently and ably guided our

collective efforts during the previous 12 months of important work of the Assembly and of the Organization.

Mr. Elbakly (Egypt): It is certainly a source of delight to see a woman at the helm of this body for the third time in the history of the United Nations — and, for the first time ever, an Arab woman. It gives me a great pleasure to congratulate you, Madam President, on behalf of the African Group, on your assumption of this important responsibility. We should like to express our confidence that you will steer our collective efforts in a capable manner throughout the sixty-first session towards a successful outcome. We are sure that you will prove to be the right woman for the job.

Our work during the sixtieth session highlighted the eagerness of Member States to seize the opportunity to reassert the relevance and importance of the United Nations — and the General Assembly in particular — with respect to the issues at the top of the international agenda. It also highlighted the need to carry out the negotiations to implement the relevant outcomes in a manner that is fair, transparent and inclusive. We have managed, with a keen sense of purpose, to achieve a great deal including the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund, the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the setting up of the Central Emergency Response Fund and the establishment of the Ethics Office, to mention only a few.

Furthermore, we successfully adopted a development follow-up resolution and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, management reform as well as resolutions on the enhancement of the oversight machinery of the Organization, the revitalization of the General Assembly and mandate review.

That work was not easy. It took all of us days — indeed, weeks — of negotiations. It also represented a daunting challenge to prove to ourselves, and to the entire world, that the United Nations is still relevant, and that the General Assembly, with its universal membership, is the only global body that is capable of delivering such courageous and bold actions.

I should therefore like to place on record the appreciation of the African Group in New York — appreciation that I am sure we all feel — for the productive manner in which the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, Foreign Minister of Sweden, carried out his arduous and important duties. Without his readiness to accept responsibility and the influence he exerted on his colleagues, we might not have been able to meet at this time and look back to appraise how much we have implemented of the 2005 Summit Outcome document.

In the meantime, we look forward to the implementation of those resolutions during the sixty-first session. Moreover, we need to deliver on environmental governance and the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, and achieve a more coherent system to better support Member States in their efforts to realize the Millennium Development Goals. We wish above all to see a revitalized General Assembly that lives up to the aspirations of Member States and all peoples across the globe. We need to continue our work to revitalize its role, in particular as regards the selection process of the Secretary-General, which will surely be a step forward.

As we remember the tragic incidents that shocked the world five years ago, and as we pay tribute to the innocent lives lost at the hands of terrorists, we are also happy to note the conclusion, at the end of the sixtieth session, of a counter-terrorism strategy. We hope that that humble achievement will help their souls to rest in peace and help to bring comfort to their families and loved ones. We should take this opportunity to make a solemn pledge to the victims of terrorism everywhere.

The sixtieth session witnessed a number of achievements related to the special needs of Africa. We saw the debt cancellation of some African countries in order to alleviate the debt-servicing burden and to enable them to focus on achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We saw the start of a number of quick-win projects and increased cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union.

At the same time, with great achievements come great responsibilities. The myriad challenges confronting the continent prod the international community's sense of obligation to act swiftly to lend a helping hand to end Africa's marginalization in the world economy and institutionalize effective cooperation mechanisms to respond to the continent's multidimensional requirements in a comprehensive manner.

The Peacebuilding Commission is an integral mechanism that should act as a crucible for collective

efforts in post-conflict situations. However, we must be fully aware that quick fixes do not solve deeply rooted problems and that externally prescribed treatments do not offer a panacea. The answers have to come from within.

The reports that the Secretary-General has submitted annually since 1998 on the causes of conflict in Africa have been extremely useful in identifying a wide array of issues critical to the achievement of comprehensive peace in Africa. We look forward to the sixty-first session devoting considerable attention to addressing the negative effects of those issues, including the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

The outcomes of the Banjul summit attest to Africa's firm determination to implement its peace and security policy. The ongoing efforts to establish a continent-wide early warning system, a panel of the wise and an African standby force will in time constitute, together with the Peace and Security Council, the cornerstones of that policy. However, the gap in terms of resources and technical expertise continues to shackle Africa's ability to realize its potential. Thus, a robust and timely response by the United Nations and the rest of the international community is essential to help bridge that gap.

Africa's quest for development not only stems from the inalienable right of all States to development, but is also the overwhelming desire of all its peoples and a duty to the coming generations. Restoring a just and comprehensive peace and lasting stability is fundamental if African States are to retain their place among equals in a democratic United Nations — a United Nations that, we hope, the sixty-first session will bring us a step closer towards achieving.

The African Group pledges its full support for your efforts, Madam President. We look forward to working closely with you and assisting you in carrying out your responsibilities during the sixty-first session.

Item 120 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/61/310)

The President: Next, I would like, in keeping with established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/61/310. It contains a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that nine Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years".

May I take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in document A/61/310?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the sixty-first session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly, at the beginning of each session, shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that for the sixty-first session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: China, Guyana, Kenya, Madagascar, Monaco, Peru, the Russian Federation, Tonga and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States I have mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

Letter dated 6 September 2006 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/61/320)

The President: Members are aware that, pursuant to section 1, paragraph 7, of resolution 40/243, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly should be permitted to meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly, unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

On the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services, authorization is thus sought for the following subsidiary organs: the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund, the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, and the Committee on Conferences.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize those subsidiary organs of the Assembly to meet during the main part of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.

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